

# MELISSA'S LETTER

By Martha McCulloch-Williams  
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by Martha McCulloch-Williams

It was rainy within and without. Melissa looked through dim eyes at the stormy window panes, the long slant lines outside. Her aunt Judith stirred them instead with satisfaction—they would serve so well to excuse Melissa's nonappearance at the cemetery. Nobody, indeed, would go there but the men of the post, the fliers and drummers, and maybe a few too politicians, intent on catching the Grand Army vote. Thus thought Aunt Judith to herself.

As Miss Hill and later Mrs. Bent, Aunt Judith had not spent fifty odd years in Carmel town without finding herself able to forecast rather accurately what the townfolk would or would not do.

Until this season she had been strenuous in observing Memorial day. Even yet, notwithstanding her quarrel with the Furlings and all their tribe, she did not mean openly to slight the occasion. She did not mean either that Melissa should go along, the pet of thinking, gray bearded ranks, her arms full of flowers for the quiet green graves. Melissa wasn't a child any more—going on nineteen and with her head full of love and marriage.

Neither Melissa nor Aunt Judith had kin or kin in the cemetery; there had been no man of their blood to go off to the fighting. All the same, Melissa had always saved her choicest blossoms for an especial mound, Private John Faring's grave. John Faring 3d, the private's great-uncle, had seen her, his own great-uncle, too. "Johnny had said, over and over, 'because as soon as we grow up your name will be Melissa Faring.'"

When a very young man proposes, his elders often dispose of her. John Faring had found that out when she married the man of the scene. That was six months back. Miss Day had a temper and a big nose, but she also had a fortune in hand.

John Faring and the madam were slightly taken with her, so in return was taken with her son. So they had set to work to break off the childish affair between John and Melissa. They were not mercenary, only thrifty; ambitious for their one child. Therefore it seemed to them hard and cruel the way Mrs. Bent took fire at their well meant suggestions. Sell them her house and go away indeed! she would have them know if there was any moving home they might do it themselves. She would have them remember also that she had founded Carmel; also that the Furlings could have better chances simply for turning over her hand. She (Mrs. Bent) had felt all along that with her looks and her school Melissa ought to look higher. But as to telling the child what to do, well, that remained with herself. Still, if Melissa had any Hill blood in her, it was mighty unlikely she would go into a family that didn't make her welcome.

The inevitable outcome was a break and a pair of sore hearts. Then fate took up the running and in cruel kindness gave Melissa a fortune—a fortune twice as big as Miss Adrienne Day could show. Johnny Faring did not give up hope until he heard of it. Then he turned very white, and after a sleepless night about the debt of Carmel from his feet. He could never go to Melissa and make her hear reason of that such going would mean shameless fortune hunting.

As yet the fortune had made little outward change, except that there were no more customers coming to the Bent house, the old Hill homestead. Aunt Judith bustled about helping the maid of all work, the while keeping for a covert watch upon her niece. After a little she said, speaking half meditatively:

"Come on up in the parrot, Melissa. A rainy day like this always makes me want to rummage. Besides, I've got to get out the flags. Will put out right on the peak of the porch and the other over the front door. Of course nobody'll see 'em. Even this town won't turn out in face of such a storm, but I just can't let the day pass as any other. Even if the flags do get spoiled we can afford to buy new ones."

grass. It was not a big knot. It would hardly show in the long grass over a sunny grave.

As she bent at last to lay it on the grave she thrust into it the note. Then, without a backward look, she hurried away. In a little while she was home again, with her absence undiscovered. She sat down by the window, but her eyes were no longer dim. Instead they looked out at the rainy world, bright and full of expectation.

John Faring 3d had come home for Memorial day and in spite of the storm went out to the cemetery. The grave was damp and cool—the old post had come and gone—all the old fellows in carriages heaped with flowers—but somehow the graves did not look as he remembered them. The flowers were bumped and lumped and soiled. Private John Faring had not been forgotten, but his resting place especially was unlike itself. John had knelt down by it, heedless of oozy turf, and tried with numbing awkwardness to better its arrangement. Thus his eyes rested upon the knot of wild flowers and caught the dull gleam of sordid paper in the midst of them. Reverently he unfolded the note and read with blurred vision:

Dear Uncle John—I bring you all I can this year. Aunt Ju owns the flowers—and she hates you name. But I love it. I wish my name might be Faring. There was no signature. John 3d needed none. He went and kissed the knot of flowers, still fresh under the pouring rain, then, with an unuttered prayer, turned about and went with long strides toward the Bent house. He had let the quarrel of the elders separate him from his sweetheart—his sweetheart—doubtless dear in that she had shown herself so brave.

"I say you must stay," Melissa said under her breath and hiding her face in his breast.

Auction in France.

The French mode of conducting auctions is rather odd. In sales of land, the affair is placed in the hands of a notary, who for the time being becomes an auctioneer. The property, which ever be its nature, is first examined by competent judges, who fix upon it a price, considerably less than its value, but always sufficient to pre-vent any ruinous loss by a preconcerted plan or combination of bidders. The property is then offered with the fixed valuation stated. The auctioneer is provided with a number of small wax tapers, each capable of burning about five minutes. As soon as a bid is made one of these tapers is placed in a holder of all interested parties and is lighted. If before it expires another bid is offered, it is immediately extinguished, and a fresh taper placed in the stand, and so on until one flickers and dies out of itself, when the last bid becomes irrevocable. This simple plan prevents all contention among rival bidders and affords a reasonable time for reflection before making a higher offer than the one preceding. By this means, too, the auctioneer is prevented from exercising undue influence upon the bidders or hastily accepting the bid of a favorite.

A Queen's Vow.

For some time after her marriage with Napoleon the Empress Marie Louise was an extremely ignorant of the French language. On one occasion, seeing her husband look vexed over a letter he had received from the court, she was the matter. "Oh, nothing," replied Napoleon; "your father is an old gannache, that is all." Marie Louise did not at all work, the while keeping for a covert watch upon her niece. After a little she said, speaking half meditatively:

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## HIS SOCIAL EXPERIMENT

By Willard Wall Wheeler  
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"Well, that spoils the evening for me," observed Strong gloomily, fidgeting a note which said that the grip would prevent a certain young lady from attending the opera that night. "Gladys is sick. No; no; no; if I am! These eleven hours ago I was getting too frequent. I won't stand for it. I wonder if Elizabeth Miller will go, he mused, continuing his dressing. 'No; I'll stay at home tonight. What right has a girl to make a fellow miserable anyhow? I come here to be happy, not to be miserable.'"

"And here's your mendin', Mr. Howard," said the young woman who entered. She addressed him according to a custom in his family before the death of his parents had driven him into an apartment house, where he had found a position for the faithful servant. "Thank you, Mary," said Strong without pausing in his dressing, but with a colder button. "Mary, I have a couple of extra tickets for the theater tonight. Can't you get Fat to take you?"

"It's always Fat you're a-teasin' me about, Mr. Howard, and there ain't a Fat-not for me. I ain't pretty enough, and then, I'm thirty-five. Sure, it's easy a year since I've seen a theater. All our money goes to the doctor. I'll have to go alone."

"No, Mary, you must not be neglectful in that fashion," he said, turning abruptly from the mirror. "Let me be Fat tonight."

"Oh, Mr. Howard, I couldn't—it wouldn't do, sir. Oh, Mr. Howard, it's jokin' you are, after all," she exclaimed as a smile spread over her face. "No, Mary, I never was more serious in my life. I am going to give you, Mary, the best time of your life. Put on your best bonnet and be ready by a quarter to 8. You live at—"

"On Third avenue, 2736, back, three flights up. But, Mr. Howard—"

"No excuse, Mary. Now goodbye, or we'll both be late."

Throughout dinner at the club that night Strong's face repeatedly relaxed at the odds of his experiment. Its unconventionality did not worry him, for the wealth and social position of the Strong put him beyond the sting of criticism.

"Opera tonight, Strong?" drawled Young Castledown, whom he particularly disliked, dropping into a vacant seat beside him.

"Yes, I had planned to surprise Gladys with that new play—Man-tan-for a change, but she's sick. However, you needn't waste any time asking Elizabeth Miller," laughed Castledown, "for I'm going to take her."

"Oh, don't worry," replied Strong, smiling.

ing a heart to heart talk with himself, in which two young women prominently figured. What Mary said and did in a situation new to her in another story, but when it was over she sighed as if waking from a beautiful dream. "Hello, Strong! Got her, after all, I see," came to his ears as he was entering the foyer. Turned, he saw Castledown with Elizabeth Miller. "How are you, Elizabeth?" he inquired. "Miss Miller, let me present Miss McGinnis, and Mr. Castledown—Miss McGinnis." Castledown, gazing in wonder, forgot to bow, but Elizabeth bowed gracefully. "It was a friend of Strong's. That was sufficient for her. Soon they passed on."

"Oh, Mr. Howard! That's the girl with the beautiful eyes," exclaimed Mary. "Ain't she handsome though? And you don't care—"

"I have not said I didn't care, Mary," he said simply, but earnestly. "And, oh, Mr. Howard, there's the girl with the aurea hair, too!" she interrupted. "Why, I thought she was the sick one."

"Gladys Hastings," involuntarily came to his lips as he followed Mary's gaze. In a moment he was opposite her and their eyes had met. "Oh, Howard, I—I thought we—I thought you were going to the opera!" she exclaimed in confusion. "You see, the countess came, and I was so much better, I could not disappoint him. He is here in New York only for one evening. But, pardon—let me present Mr. Strong—Count de Migny." And her eyes wandered brightly to Mary.

"And let me introduce the Duke of Kilkenny—Miss Hastings and Count de Migny," said Strong gravely, the smiling inwardly. The count's French manners brought forth a low "I while Gladys scarcely nodded."

"And wasn't that girl?" asked Castledown when they were in the carriage. "Yes," Strong replied, but he was silent for a long time.

"What was so much to me," finally ventured, "while Miss Hastings treated me as if I was a real lad. And you are, Mary—a real lad. That will make both of them bit. But here we are at you and you say your father is to work, and you support the family. Well, you are a noble girl, and I'll appreciate the way you look me and my apartment."

"Thank you, Mr. Howard," she said, gratefully, thinking it was her month tip of \$5. "This will help father. Mr. Howard, you've given me the best time of my life. I'll never forget that night."

"You're a noble girl," he said, looking at her. "That's the trouble with most of 'em, but trust me to get the worth of my time out of him, one way or another. As for Mary, 'Just give my love to your mother.'"

"What's your trouble with him—close fisted?" "Some people think he is."

"That's the trouble with most of 'em, but trust me to get the worth of my time out of him, one way or another. As for Mary, 'Just give my love to your mother.'"

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